

## Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

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DCS Communications Office

**February 25, 2005**

### The Week Ahead

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**Wed., March 2** – The Commissioner attends the regional administrator meeting in Nashville at the TPS campus.

**Thurs., March 3** – The Commissioner attends the House Finance, Ways and Means Committee Budget Hearing with Core Leadership Team staff members at Legislative Plaza.

### Statewide EPSDT screening rate now at 95 percent

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*Submitted by Mary Beth Franklyn, TennCare Liaison, Blue Ribbon Committee*

An analysis of 2004 data shows that DCS has an excellent record of taking children in care to the health department for their annual early periodic screening, diagnosis and treatment (EPSDT) visit, which is now at 95 percent. Case managers should be especially congratulated for this tremendous accomplishment.

One of the goals outlined in the Path to Excellence is for screenings to be completed within 30 days of a child entering care. Many regions are doing great in this area, and some need to make some improvements. You'll be hearing more about screenings completed in 30 days at your regional CQI meetings.

### Groundbreaking at Taft Youth Development Center

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*Submitted by Carol Muscarnero, Personnel Analyst 2, Taft Youth Development Center*

Students and staff at Taft Youth Development Center held a groundbreaking ceremony on February 22 for the new multipurpose building and central operations center. The building will replace five existing buildings on campus, some of which had been designated for temporary use years ago and have been repaired several times. The multipurpose building will be the home of education and treatment programs. The central operations center will house operations and visitation. The new buildings will be completed by April 2006.



(Pictured left to right are Jim Gordon, Director of Facilities and Support Services; Ken Steverson, Executive Director of Juvenile Justice; Larry Lively, Superintendent; Tom Riche, Deputy Commissioner; Ken Chamberlain and Brian Templeton, architects with Upland Design; and Howard Swack, project manager with Mid-State Construction.)

### **DCS Speak-Outs**

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The DCS Speak-Outs, originally scheduled to begin during the last week of February, have been rescheduled and will be held in March. The Speak-Outs will be held at various university consortium sites across the state, with each region being proportionately represented and various types of employee positions and experience levels being included as well.

As outlined in the Path to Excellence, our agency is committed to developing and retaining a diverse and qualified workforce. The 600 employees who will be randomly invited to attend the Speak-Outs will address issues key to helping to ensure a content and productive workforce, as the agency continues working to serve children and families in Tennessee.

As part of the planning process, a permanent e-mail address has been created to share ideas in preparation for the Speak-Outs and as an open line for all employees to have a medium through which to send concerns or suggestions. The e-mail address is [DCS.SpeakOuts@state.tn.us](mailto:DCS.SpeakOuts@state.tn.us).

We encourage you to submit your experiences, concerns and ideas to this mailbox, which will help inform the agenda for the DCS Speak-Outs.

## **Building Supports Around Children and Their Families**

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*Submitted by Shalonda Cawthon, Director, Relative Caregiver Program, Child and Family Well-Being*

With all the negative press we've experienced in recent months, it's great to take an opportunity and reflect upon some of the good work that we as a Department are doing to support our children and families. Tennessee is one of few states that are truly making an effort to build a comprehensive system of supports for kinship families caring for both custodial and non-custodial children.

As a Department, we recognize that extended family members and other adults with a significant relationship to the child are our most accessible and natural resources when considering placement options.

As a policy, placement with relatives shall always be preferred over placement with a non-relative, as long as the relative home can provide a safe and stable environment.

As a practice, we must ensure that we are diligently searching for relatives on the front-end, properly assessing the potential placement arrangement, informing relatives of all their options as relative caregivers on the front-end, and respectfully helping relatives understand their role and the role of the Department in attaining permanency for the child in their care.

The following supportive networks currently exist, or are in the process of being developed for kinship families in Tennessee:

**Kinship Foster Care** – Option available for relatives and other adults with a significant relationship with a child (kin) to care for children who are in the custody of the Department. There is a process for expedited placement with kin; however, there is no longer an expedited approval process. The potential kinship foster parent must successfully complete all requirements prior to foster care board payment being issued. Children in kinship foster care are eligible to receive the same services as any other child in foster care.

**Relative Caregiver Program** - Option available for relatives caring for non-custodial children who require out-of-home care. Children and relative caregivers receive

supportive services, such as information and referral, support groups, respite, recreation, and family advocacy in order to prevent children from entering and/or re-entering state custody. The Department does not have any oversight with the family, and the family does not receive a monthly stipend through the program.

The program currently exists in the Shelby, Davidson and Upper Cumberland regions. Statewide expansion of the program will occur in two phases with Phase I beginning in July 2005. Services are administered through collaborative effort between the Department and community-based agencies.

**Families First Kinship Care Pilot** - Effective April 1, 2005, the Departments of Children's Services and the Department of Human Services will initiate a pilot program, known as Families First Kinship Care. The pilot will take effect in Shelby, Davidson, Macon, Smith, Dekalb, Cannon, Fentress, Van Buren, Warren, White, Overton, Putnam, Jackson, Clay, Pickett and Cumberland counties. The goal of the program is to encourage placements with relatives for children who are at-risk of removal from their home and placement in state custody. This pilot program allows DCS to support the prevention of children entering into state custody – when appropriate – by offering eligible kinship families an additional payment to supplement the Families First Child-Only grant offered by DHS.

**Permanent Guardianship** – We have presented a Permanent Guardianship Bill to the 2005 Tennessee State Legislature. If approved, permanent guardianship would be another permanency option available to families caring for children for whom reunification and adoption are not viable options. Parental rights would not be terminated, but would be limited.

**Subsidized Guardianship** – The Department has recently submitted a proposal requesting a Title IV-E Waiver to demonstrate a subsidized guardianship program. This would allow the transfer of legal responsibility of a child from the Department to a relative, while still providing a monthly subsidy to the relative – as in adoption assistance. However, this option would not require termination of parental rights.

Though we have a ways to go in our best practice approach to working with kinship families, as you can see we've come a long way as a Department and have much of which to be proud.

## **Core Leadership**

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**CORE Leadership Meeting  
Randal Lea, Presiding  
February 22, 2005**

## **Commissioner's Update**

The Commissioner's Retreat was a wonderful and powerful event. Many regions brought private providers and foster parents. One region also included representation from a youth development center (YDC). The skits were insightful and provided an opportunity for people to share their regional implementation plans. Foster parents seemed to understand the importance of relative placements. The Commissioner stated we still have work to do, stressing that some of the salient points discussed were still child-focused, and the agency is moving toward a family-strengths model.

## **Path to Excellence (P2E) Status**

The Path to Excellence is a management plan for the entire organization. A proposal was presented to the Core Leadership Team (CLT) to move the reporting system to the executive directors and include quarterly updates to focus on goals and strategies. We have to become proactive with our reporting on the P2E. A conference call with the plaintiffs has been scheduled for next week on the Needs Assessment. A Technical Assistance Committee (TAC) meeting has been scheduled for March 9.

## **Next Steps**

CLT members will meet on Sat., February 26, at 9 a.m. at Central Office to discuss P2E progress.

## **Complaints Process**

Tammy Feldman stated the purpose of the Ombudsman's office is to communicate the caller or client's concerns to the appropriate regional/central office staff. They will also coordinate resolutions of caller's concerns. Feldman stressed the importance of a quick turnaround of approximately two weeks. The Commissioner suggested developing a form letter with an identified timeframe to send to callers and clients. The Ombudsman's office receives letters from a variety of sources, including the general public, Governor's office, legislature, governor IQ systems (emails), phone calls on 800 number, schools, lawyers, legislatures and e-mails forwarded from the Commissioner or CLT members.

When complaint e-mails are received by CLT, members should forward these emails to Donna Cherry and cc: Tammy Feldman. The Ombudsman's office will send a reply to all when a resolution has been determined. The Ombudsman's office is trying to get a handle on the tracking system and also categorize complaints. The goal is to eventually coordinate information to CQI coordinators. It may help to purchase the same data system as Governor's office. Judy Cole will follow-up with the regions, which need to identify a designee to coordinate with the Ombudsman's office.



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***“Never give in! Never give in! Never, never, never. Never – in anything great or small, large or petty – never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense.” – Winston Churchill***

***True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others, at whatever cost. – Arthur Ashe***